

Great Lakes Youth & Family Camp

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I'm humbled tonight as I reflect upon my day. Every once-in-a-great-while I get to be present for a moment when it seems like the kingdom of God is breaking into our drab, everyday reality in vivid color that's almost overwhelming.

This evening was the annual camp's "talent night". If you've been involved in camping ministry, you've probably suffered through a number of these experiences (as I have over the years). It was a pretty typical talent night: special songs and funny skits, talent that was good, talent that was not-so-good and talent that was somewhere in-between. One thing that struck me was the number of musical numbers that were heartfelt expressions of worship. It reminded me of 1 Corinthians 14:26: "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church." A wide variety of people, young and old alike, contributed something to the experience.



The pinnacle of the evening for me was near the end of the program when a middle aged man named "Bill" was called forward for his musical number. I must confess that I don't know Bill well and that our interactions have been fairly limited, but I've observed that Bill lives with some level of diminished mental or cognitive capacity. The emcee announced that Bill would be offering the hymn "How Great Thou Art". The music started; obviously somewhat nervous, Bill began to sing and it quickly became clear that the music was not "How Great Thou Art", but rather another great old hymn, "Amazing Grace". The sound technician promptly stopped the recording and asked for a moment to correct the situation. There was an awkward silence as we all waited for the proper music to be located. Eventually, one of the sound techs headed to the front of the auditorium for a brief consultation with the emcee and Bill. It was announced that they were experiencing some "technical difficulty" and would be moving

on to the next act with the hope of bringing Bill back in a moment once the right accompaniment was located.

The sensitivity and care that the emcee, the sound technician and the audience showed Bill was discernable and genuine. It brought to mind the truth of 1 Corinthians 12:21-26:

“The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

The music could not be located and so one of the song leaders offered to help Bill sing the song acapella. With the song leader singing quietly beside Bill, he began singing into the microphone and proceeded to sing all the verses of the song (the song leader slowly faded into the background and took a seat after the first verse and chorus). It was beautiful, it was heartfelt and it was obvious worship of our Lord. It wasn’t slick or polished and probably wouldn’t meet most of our “standards of excellence”, but it was real! By the end of the song most of the audience had joined Bill in singing “then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art.” At the end of the song most of the room rose to give Bill a standing ovation.

I was led into the presence of the Lord by a man who probably doesn’t grasp a lot of the theological terms, ideas and jargon that are so much a part of my world. My guess is that Bill doesn’t have a lot of folks seeking his opinion, insight or input on their important decisions; but his simple act of praise and worship moved me, humbled me and gave me a glimpse of what the kingdom of God really looks like.

So often in our brokenness, we fail to get it right in the church. So often we fall short of being the body that Jesus calls us to be as we seek to represent him to the world. Tonight I got to witness a few moments where we got it right and it was beautiful. I’m grateful to God for graciously allowing me to get a glimpse of such a beautiful sight.

Lance

